

HO-1

Stress Symptoms

Check the symptoms of stress you've noticed lately in yourself.

Physical

- appetite change
- headaches
- tension
- fatigue
- insomnia
- weight change
- colds
- muscle aches
- digestive upset
- pounding heart
- accident prone
- teeth grinding
- rash
- restlessness
- foot-tapping
- finger drumming
- drug, tobacco, alcohol use increased

Emotional

- anxiety
- frustration
- the "blues"
- mood swings
- bad temper
- nightmares
- crying spells
- irritability
- "no one cares"
- depression
- nervous laugh
- worrying
- easily discouraged
- easily discouraged
- little joy

Spiritual

- emptiness
- loss of meaning
- doubt
- unforgiving
- martyrdom
- looking for magic
- loss of direction
- needing to "prove" self
- cynicism
- apathy

Mental

- forgetfulness
- dull senses
- poor concentration
- low productivity
- negative attitude
- confusion
- lethargy
- whirling mind
- no new ideas
- boredom
- spacing out
- negative self-talk

Social

- isolation
- intolerance
- resentment
- loneliness
- lashing out
- hiding
- claming up
- lowered sex drive
- nagging
- distrust
- fewer contacts with friends
- lack of intimacy
- using people

Stress Management

Balancers

- ✓ Socialize
(Get a life!)
- ✓ Humor
- ✓ Fun
- ✓ Creativity
- ✓ Environment
- ✓ Spirituality
(however you interpret it)

Stress Management

Buffers

- ✓ Nutrition
 - Eat Breakfast
 - Decrease Caffeine
 - Decrease Sugar
 - “Stress” Vitamins
- ✓ Exercise
- ✓ Relax
- ✓ Sleep

Benson's Relaxation Response

This skill may take one or two weeks to master. Develop a routine to use this exercise weekly.

Directions

1. Sit quietly in a comfortable position.
2. Remove jewelry, and contact lens. Loosen constrictive clothing such as belts and ties.
3. Close your eyes and pay attention to your breathing.
4. Allow your muscles to relax as you exhale. You feel heavy and warm. Your whole body feels very, very relaxed.
5. Deeply relax as your muscles, beginning at your feet and progressing up to your face. Keep them deeply relaxed.
6. Breathe through your nose. Become aware of your breathing.
7. Continue for 20 minutes. You may open your eyes to check the time but do not use an alarm. When you finish, sit quietly for several minutes with your eyes closed and then open your eyes.
8. Do not worry about whether you are successful in achieving a deep level of relaxation. Maintain a passive attitude and permit relaxation to occur at its own pace. Do not practice within two hours after a meal, since the digestive process may interfere with the elicitation of the relaxation response.

Source: Herbert Benson, Relaxation Response (New York: William Morrow, 1975)

Relaxation Exercises

Purpose:

- To reduce or prevent physical symptoms of stress
- To reduce or prevent mental symptoms of stress
- To reduce or prevent anxiety

I Breathing

- A. Controlling your breathing, or breathing in a special way for only a few minutes can help you relax.
- B. Place one hand on your abdomen and one on your chest to feel where you are breathing. Abdominal movement indicates deep, relaxed breathing.
- C. Close your eyes and practice deep breathing. Try inhaling through your nose and exhaling slowly through your mouth, allowing yourself to sigh.
- D. Feel your lungs expanding and contracting, and allow your abdomen to rise and fall.

II Progressive Muscle Relaxation

- A. Starts by tensing up a muscle group and relaxing it to create an awareness of tension and relaxation.
- B. Order: Arms, facial area with neck, shoulders and upper back; then chest, stomach and lower back; next hips, thighs, calves, feet then toes.
- C. It should be practiced in a quiet comfortable place, reclining or stretched out on the floor.
- D. Spend 15-20 minutes doing these including the breathing with your eyes closed.
- E. Tense each muscle group while inhaling and relax on the exhalation.
- F. With practice, you can drop the tensing of the muscles and just combine the breathing and relaxing.

III Visualization

- A. Is a type of daydreaming for relaxation purposes.
- B. A specific scene is imagined and then it is developed.
- C. Ex: You're lying on a warm, sandy beach. The sun is soothng on your back. The warm sand is molded softly beneath the curves of your body. You can hear the rhythm of the waves as they roll in gently. You are breathing slowly with them. You feel very calm and relaxed, almost falling asleep.

Quick Relaxation Techniques

1. Rag Doll- Stand up and then bend over at the waist and hang down like a floppy doll. Stay there without jerking or bouncing. As your muscles relax, your hands will get closer to the floor. Hold for 15-30 seconds.
2. Yawn and Sigh- Open your mouth and throat wide and inhale deeply until the “automatic yawn response” takes over.
3. Spread Eagle- In your chair, lean back, spread your legs, and let your arms flop down. If possible, lean your head against a wall. Close your eyes, and stay in that position until you are relaxed.
4. Swimmer’s Shake- While standing, jiggle your arms like a swimmer who is getting ready to compete. Keep the arms going and jiggle each leg. Shake off fatigue and tenseness the way a wet dog shakes off water.
5. Isometrics- Push the palms of your hands together hard, or push against a wall. Interlock your fingers and try to pull them apart. *Note: this is not recommended for individuals with high blood pressure.*
6. Shoulder Stretch- Sit up straight, bring your shoulders back as if you’re trying to touch your shoulder blades together. Hold and release. Then bring your shoulders up as though you were trying to touch your ears with your shoulders. Hold, and release. Finally, bring your shoulders forward as though you were trying to touch them in front of yourself. Hold, and release. Repeat two to three times.